

BATTLE OVER SINGING IN BAPTIST CHURCHES 17TH CENTURY

June 26, 2012 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article)

The following is from Paxton Hood, *Isaac Watts His Life and Hymns*, p. 100-102 --

“It was about the time that Isaac Watts came to London that some of the assemblies of the saints were shaken by the innovation of singing. The Baptists appear to have been most indisposed to the doubtful practice; and in the church of the well-known Benjamin Keach, of Southwark, the pastoral ancestor of Charles Spurgeon, when the pastor, after long argument and effort, established singing, a minority withdrew and ‘took refuge in a songless sanctuary,’ in which the melody within the heart might be in no danger of disturbance from the perturbations of song. The Society of Friends was not alone in regarding with distaste all the exercises of song in the house of the Lord. Those who are interested in the curious literature of that time may easily discover pamphlets and lectures which show ‘great searchings of heart’ upon the question ‘whether Christ, as Mediator of the New Covenant, hath commanded His churches under the Gospel in all their assemblies to sing the Psalms of David, as translated into metre and musical rhyme, with tunable and conjoined voices of all the people together, as a Church ordinance, or any other song or hymn that are so composed to be sung in rhyme by a prelimited and set form of words?’ The dispute was mainly confined to the Baptist churches. But in 1708 one of the Eastcheap lectures, in a discourse by Thomas Reynolds, replied to the ‘objections of singing.’ A few years before the controversy had run strong and high. Isaac Marlow very angrily maintained the ordinary songless usage, in the year 1696, in his ‘Truth Soberly Defined’ and in the ‘Controversies of Singing Brought to an End.’ Benjamin Keach seems to have been the first to lead on in this suspicious diversion by the publication of his ‘Breach Repaired in God’s Worship; or, Singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, proved to be an Holy Ordinance of Jesus Christ.’ This appeared in 1691. ... It was into this state of things that Isaac Watts was introduced. ‘I almost think,’ says Alexander Knox, ‘that he was providentially appointed to furnish the revived movement of associated piety, which Divine Wisdom foresaw would take place in England in the 18th century, with an unexampled stock of materials for that department, which alone needed to be provided for, of their joint worship.’”

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